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MY NAME IS
FRANK



Seaman Frank

a merchant seaman talks

MY NAME IS
FRANK

by
Frank Laskier

London
George Allen & Unwin Ltd

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Foreword

THIS book is probably unique, since it has never been written. Every word has been spoken to the microphone by a merchant seaman, who talked without so much as a rehearsal or a note in front of him.

It takes its title from the opening words of the tenth talk here, which was one of the first he actually recorded. Frank did not wish his surname to be known, since he regards himself as no more than a representative of his mates, the seamen of the Merchant Navy. The Press, however, has stripped him of his anonymity.

When he first spoke in the BBC's Home Service, a woman wrote in to say that it was the finest talk she had heard since the outbreak of war. It was so good that she felt sure it must be "phoney". Quite a lot of other people have implied their belief that Frank's broadcasts were prepared by a skilled writer and spoken by a first-class actor. I hope this book will finally dispel any lingering doubts about Frank's authenticity.

This is how he came to the BBC microphone. In the late spring of 1941 Terence de

Marney, an "Observer"—radio equivalent of newspaper reporter—went on a tour of some of the badly bombed British ports, taking a recording car and engineer with him. I was one of the party, since such an expedition was likely to provide good material for articles, especially for the listeners to the BBC's Empire Service.

Among the places we visited was the Seamen's Home at Liverpool. Our time-table would not allow us more than an afternoon to gather records and copy. But we agreed that it was a promising place for first-class material, since seamen fetch up there straight from the Battle of the Atlantic, many of them the survivors of torpedoed ships.

So a little later de Marney got leave to return to Liverpool, where he spent six weeks as an ordinary inmate of the Home, living, sleeping, eating, drinking with its shifting population, becoming so much their mate, so much part of the furniture, that they lost all self-consciousness in his presence and talked as men do only when they feel at ease among friends.

He heard many good stories, naturally, but not the ace story and the ace speaker that he felt sure would turn up in the long run.

After some weeks he got wind of a seaman

with "a bee in his bonnet" about using petrol for joy-rides. That was Frank, and de Marney found him perfectly ready to talk. He had only to hear him once to know that he had found what he was looking for. He 'phoned for a recording car, set the microphone down in front of Frank at a table in a Liverpool café, and said, "Now then, Frank, when you're ready, tell me that story again".

That story is told in the tenth talk here, the story of the *San Demetrio*, which had a friend of Frank's aboard her.

The remarkable thing about that broadcast is that it happened precisely as I have said. Without a script or a note, without a hesitation, Frank told the microphone his story exactly as it is printed here. The same happened with every other talk. de Marney, living in Frank's pocket all the time, would simply let him yarn until some fresh treasure came floating up from the depths of Frank's photographic memory. Then de Marney would say, "That's the story I want", arrange for a recording as soon as possible, and sit Frank down in front of the microphone again. Very often what he said then was not quite the same as the first version, for he would be re-thinking and re-remembering again as he talked to the microphone.

The talks as printed here are simply the verbatim reports of the recordings. All I have done is to arrange them in an order that will give a consecutive picture of Frank's experiences, and to punctuate them. The last has been my greatest difficulty. It may be possible to punctuate and paragraph a prepared platform speech according to the canons of the printed word. But it is quite impossible to make those canons give a true interpretation of the speech of a man who is thinking aloud, whispering to himself rather than to the microphone.

So I have set those canons aside, and punctuated in a way that would be anathema to the literary stylist, using dashes as often as not instead of stops, "and" to begin a sentence, making paragraphs, sometimes, of single short sentences. If the method is wrong, the fault is solely mine. But it seems to give a truer picture than the conventional method could of the unrehearsed drama as Frank's memories come welling up to catch him by the throat.

Occasionally, but not always, I have cut out a few words where Frank has stumbled or repeated himself. I have inserted a few explanatory notes.

Otherwise this book is Frank's and Frank's alone, just as he first spoke it, speaking so low

that the microphone had to be pressed up a few inches from his lips. That helps to account, by the way, for the rare emotional quality of his words as they come out of the loud-speaker. Most people speak fairly loudly, and the microphone is a foot or more away. But it is so close to Frank that it picks up his very breathing and the swift catch of breath as an old memory grips him again.

He had another considerable advantage. He was recording, not going out "live". So he had not to bother about timing. A third advantage was actually that he spoke without a script. Most people tend to talk too fast for the microphone, and to become unnatural if they slow down. But Frank, digging down into his memory and thinking aloud, speaks naturally at the right speed, and also with those natural pauses, accelerations and slowings down of speech which prevent monotony.

But those are minor points. The chief reason for Frank's success, I think, is simply that he is a seaman. There are many thousands of seamen who have had like experiences, and of them some hundreds, probably, share Frank's natural taste and gift of yarning. In the peaceful, monotonous life of the peace-time sailor, as described in the first talk here, such men are valued shipmates, and one yarn will set

another going. Also, men who are not constantly reading and writing tend to have better memories than office folk, and their vivid experiences bite deep.

But these other Franks have not yet been discovered.

There is no need, either, to be surprised at Frank's occasional flashing phrase, or his obvious acquaintance with some of the classics of English literature. The vivid phrase comes naturally to the lips of men who have vivid experiences; and many seamen are much better read than their fellows ashore. The sea gives a lot of time to be killed by reading, and every ship's library contains, besides (Frank's words) "a lot of trash", the Bible and Shakespeare at least, and often a lot more of the nobler stuff of our tongue. Also a seaman's language is not daily vitiated by the clichés of the daily Press.

Frank, who was avid for books as a boy, has since read Kipling, Conrad, and Stevenson—and probably others that I have not yet heard him mention. This explains a good deal in a man with a photographic memory.

I have tried to show that Frank is only typical of his fellow seamen. It is what he would like me to do; and I believe it is also the truth. I have sailed in the little ships and

feel I know the breed who man them. I only need to sketch Frank's own personality and background, which seem equally typical.

His father, also a seaman until he retired to a ship's laundry business, had ten children whom he ruled with a tongue of iron—ruled, that is, until each one in turn showed the old man's own determination to go their own ways. Then he forgave them; and the family, though bad letter-writers and scattered all over the globe, is still a united family. Frank describes himself as the black sheep because he has never, like the others, risen in the world. He is still a deckhand owing to "mental laziness" and dislike of mathematics. Another reason, I think, is that he does not want executive responsibility and loves the care-free life and comradeship of the ordinary seaman.

For some generations the family has been rooted in Wallasey, Cheshire, where Frank spent a happy boyhood. At the age of sixteen he had "a blazing row" with his father because he refused to read for the Ministry. A little later, when he had delivered the laundry to a ship and collected the money, a head looked over the side of another ship and said, "Come to America, sonnie?" Frank scrambled up, and half an hour later was on his way across the

Atlantic as the "Peggy" (boy) with 5s. 6d. of his father's money.

It was several months before his family even knew what had happened to him.

Ever since then Frank has followed the sea. He is now twenty-nine, but looks nearer forty. That is quite usual among seamen. In shore-going kit he does not look like a seaman. But that also is usual. He is about 5 feet 10 inches tall, of the lean and narrow build, dark and already going thin on top.

He is a most entertaining companion, quick in the conversational come-back, and enjoying his yarning as much as his hearers. He is a little more grown up than most of his mates whom I once described as being like "delightful children" when ashore. "No!" he corrected me, "adolescents". I still do not agree with him; while I found that taking Frank himself round London was like taking the nicest possible nephew to his first pantomime.

In one respect, however, Frank, like his fellows, is no longer childlike. The Germans have taught him, as his later talks show, the holy gift of hatred.

ELDON MOORE

Why I am a Sailor

PARTICULARLY in wartime when we're suffering such damage, and going through such an exciting period in our lives, a lot of people have asked me why I am a sailor—"Why don't I get a shore job, or why don't I do anything to get out of this?"—as it seems a pretty suicide sort of job according to them.

But the whole thing goes a lot deeper than that. I'll tell you my ideas on the subject.

You remember that depression affair in 1934 and 1935 and 1936—around that time? Well, we were going away to sea then, I in particular was going away. And I'd come on shore and seen people weren't so very, very happy. But, somehow or other, all that happened to you shore-side people—don't think I'm speaking contemptuously, because I mean I have a great respect for people on shore—but everything that happened on shore seemed to us to be unreal, somehow or other.

It was peacetime, we could go ashore, we could get our drink, do our shopping, see our wives, or sweethearts, or our parents, and then go away to sea.

And there is something definitely about

going away to sea, which has got me since I first pushed off, when I was about sixteen.

It's that frame of mind that you get into when you are on a long trip. Say you're going in between Abbadan and Australia, beating down on the south-east trades, and you see the sun rising every morning in the same spot. The same sea, the same sky, and the same fresh glorious breeze. The same peace and contentment. Then you can get all your dhobying out, and you can wash and scrub your clothes, and rinse them out, and compare notes—and we're much more finicky than any housewife could ever be.

And you get hold of a piece of spun yarn, and you put your clothes on it, and you hang them up on the poop.

And you have the beautiful, continuous, and easy watch and watch—4 to 8, 4 to 8, 4 to 8.

You get your meals and you're happy. You don't have to bother about cigarettes. You can sit out on the poop at night in the dog watches, and yarn and yarn—and we *always* talk about ships. And somehow or other a peace gets into your soul. Otherwise, why do we go back to sea?

When we join a ship, we continually howl and groan; and we always say that the last ship is the best ship. But it isn't true. Every

ship is the best ship. Every ship when you have your mates with you, and you know your skipper. *You* may see her on the horizon, a dirty little frowsy tramp—so she looks. But you haven't seen our quarters; you haven't met our friends. You haven't tasted the sweetness of coffee at twelve o'clock at night.

You haven't listened to the thrill of the striking of sixteen bells on New Year's Eve. You haven't sailed up the river to your home port, and you haven't joined her.

We are a race apart. We are the sailors.

And do you think that a nation like the Germans could ever drive us from the sea? Do you think that a dive bomber could stop us from earning our livelihood? Do you think they would ever deprive us of the only peace we have ever known on earth?

We are British, we are they who go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in big waters. We see the glory of the Lord--and we *do*. And we always will, and that is why we are sailors.

Joining your Ship

WE have a saying in the Merchant Service, "If you've signed your ship, you've got to join her"; and it has a lot of equivalents in shore life—such a saying as "a man is as good as his word", and things like that. But it just means that amongst we who follow the sea for a living, that once you have put your pen to paper and signed your name then, no matter what happens, you must join your ship.

You walk out of the shipping office and in your pocket you have two pieces of paper. One is an allotment note for some money to be stopped out of your wages, to give to your wife or your mother each week, and the other is an advance note. The advance note is a sort of sub. on your wages. Well, you take your advance note round, and there are several sharks who are always waiting to cash them for you; and sometimes they're not sharks, they're darn nice people, and you get the money from them. They usually charge you about sixpence in the pound—the nice people I mean—and then you go off.

You may have one or two drinks—it just depends how you feel like it—but there on your advance note and your allotment paper

is written, "You will join your ship at five minutes past twelve, evening", or "at night". You go out and you buy your soap.—Have you ever seen a sailor buying soap? He isn't put off by any cheap substitute; it must be good soap. You buy your soap and your soap flakes—maybe if you're feeling very, very finicky indeed, a couple of packets of patent soap powder.

And you buy matches by the gross; you buy razor blades by the dozen, and you always forget *something*. Usually you forget to buy a toothbrush, or toothpaste. That means you've either got to clean your teeth with a towel or clean your teeth with a brush and some soap. Both of them are pretty horrible alternatives.

You pack all these things into your pocket and you stand there at about nine o'clock at night and you think, "Well, have I got everything?"—Believe me, no housewife ever living has such a worry. But we don't let it worry us too much and then we go home.

And then there is that horrible moment that always hurts—it's always hurt me I know—when you get up out of your easy-chair at about half-past ten, and the last bus is going and the ship is waiting. And being a man and a sailor, you can't kiss people good-bye; and you sort of look at each other and shake hands and say, "Well, I'll be seeing you". And with

a heart that's always heavy you set off for your ship.

And you come on board, climbing up the gangway with your kit bag on your shoulder, and you make your way aft or for'ard to your quarters and you dump your things down. And never has the fo'c'sle looked more dirty or more gloomy or more small; and you go on gangway watch.

And the next morning you are out about five in the morning, breaking out the anchor—and away you go down-stream, and your heart is always heavy with misery at the thought of leaving your friends behind.

And then about the second day out something happens to you. Maybe you're coming down from the wheel, maybe stiff with cold. You just crawl out of the foretop-lookout, the crow's nest, and you're coming down the shrouds; and you get on to the for'ard well-deck, and you shake yourself in your oilskins and your sea boots.

And you trudge along the deck with that inimitable walk that all good sailors have, and you pass the galley and you see the old cook there and you shout out, "Hullo Doc, what's for dinner?"—and maybe he shouts out "bacon and eggs", *maybe*. But you're hungry, you're young, you're helpless. You're holding down a man's job, and you've joined your ship.

Bananas

Do you remember in the piping time of peace, those long, smooth, yellow objects, with the hard, thick, tough skin outside, and very nice and soft and sweet inside? They had a sort of gentle curve to them, what were they called?—Oh yes, bananas.

Well, you remember in those idle days, when we used to have our bananas and cream and things like that? Did you ever wonder how we did bring them over?

The old banana boats, they're quite a tradition in their way, because men who sail with them never sail in any other. You go out to the West Indies to pick up your bananas, or you can go right out to the West Coast of Africa. Well, the West Coast trip isn't too good. But out at Trinidad and Jamaica, Port Arthur, Port of Spain, Montego Bay, Port Anthony, Santa Marta—my word, what a heavenly time we used to have there!

The decks were always absolutely spotlessly white, with the long black lines of the pitch running between the planks; ship painted white; everybody spotlessly clean. And finally we would receive orders, after tootling in and

out of all those funny little ports, in the back of beyond. Then we would call in at Montego Bay and finish loading cargoes.

You get into Montego Bay, and there's a little island on the port bow as you get in, and you pass the island and round into a perfect little landlocked harbour. And there all that you ever hear is the rattle of the anchor, as she's broke out, and drops. All you hear is the roar of the chain as she is brought up, and you depart. For the rest you have silence.

And the night comes in about twenty minutes and the ship is there, and they take out lights and put them over the side and open the doors in the ship's side. And you gaze in at that beautiful translucent circle of green, and see funny little fishes swimming round underneath, and you're talking there idly with your shipmates, waiting for the bananas on board. You're anchored out in the Bay of course, and you flick your cigarette ash and you watch that tiny little spot of ash as it circles and floats down and is lost in the water. You can see the dim haze of the mountains in the distance, and the sparkle of lights from the loading jetty. And you hear a dull murmur from the shore, that gets louder and louder and louder, of men singing, arguing, and shouting.

And then into that magic circle of light

there comes an enormous great scow, and it is absolutely packed with humanity—large, brawny West Indians. And they come alongside with torrents of language and terrific flat spins of arguments and shouts and screams. And they pour on board like a constant stream, and you hear them as they scream their heads off down below in the holds.

And then again into the magic circle of light there appear four even bigger scows, with a large and solitary man with a long pole at the stern end; and he sculls her gently round in the water and ties her underneath the stage. Then you see something. . . . I'll never forget it—I'll never forget the first man I saw doing that particular stunt.

He was there on a tiny little cat-walk stretched across the gunwale of the boat of this scow, and there was a man port and starboard on the for'ard end and port and starboard on the aft—you know, one on each corner of the boat. And he was there, an enormous man about, oh! six foot, great brawny brown shoulders, a pair of very, very baggy trousers, a large sun hat even though it were dark, and he's saying now, "Come on, boys, we's going to load this ship. Now come on."

And then I saw something that I've never

seen equalled yet. Every man in every corner bent down and seized up a huge bunch of bananas—they weigh about a hundredweight—lifted it over his head, slung it at the talkative laddie on the cat-walk, and he seized each bunch like a streak of lightning, dancing round there on the board.

Each bunch was grabbed up with a heave right on to the stage into the ship—and again, and again, and again. And he never stopped talking and he never stopped working.

He had to bend down as the load got lower, and as it got farther for'ard, or farther aft, the men had to throw farther. But they were coming there from each corner one, two, three, four, one hundredweight at a time, long bunches of bananas on a stalk and he'd seize them—smack, and you could hear them hitting his hands. And you could see the ripples of the muscles under his shoulders, as he hurled them up into the air and on to the stage.

There were four doors on the ship's side port, four doors on the ship's side for'ard. Those men were loading the whole time. The noise was indescribable. And they loaded that ship, or completed the loading, in twelve hours. And then they departed the way they had come.

The next morning we had to wait for mail

or something, and I got a boat on shore. Just there on that little jetty I crawled up the green, slimy ladder and along there, with the ground all littered with banana skins and large spiders stalking relentlessly about, and then on to the beach. Underneath the little huts there I found my large friend of the night before, our large, talkative athlete. And I sat down by him, offered him a cigarette, and asked him how he was getting on, and he turned round to me with eyes that were glazed with the inherited sloth of centuries of idle living.

He said, "Well boss, you sec, we work things like this. We never see anything round here for months, and months, and weeks, and weeks. Well, a boy wants to play a little bit dice occasionally, he wants to get a drink of rum occasionally, so when the boat comes in we just loads up the skins and we work for about twelve hours"—and his voice died away to idleness and sleep.

That is the way they were living—twelve hours' work, six months' idleness. And if I'd had any sense at all I think I'd have stayed there and loaded bananas with him for the rest of my life. Really, I wanted to.

Nick Tamlin

(In this talk Frank was clearly addressing his fellow seamen)

ABOUT five years ago I was down in my home in the *query* village—and I don't mean Barry Docks, I mean Falmouth—and there I met a man, the most amazing, the most astounding person I've ever met in all my life. His name was Nick Tamlin, and he was bo'sun of one of the British tankers. You could say that he was tough, but he was more than tough. He had an air of restrained violence about him. He knew things; he had sailed.

When the war started in Spain he was one of the first to sign up with that Greek who was running ships out there, and go down to Valencia. He had his first taste of warfare, of modern warfare, from the Germans and the Italians running ships between Valencia and Alicante.

Nick Tamlin! You have to see him to believe him. A tall man, red-faced, blue eyes, never under any circumstances wearing anything like ordinary civilian clothes. Sometimes incredibly foul-mouthed, sometimes drunk. Beautiful

speaking voice—and courage! One ship that he was on, I will never forget it as long as I live. She had been loaded up too deep with benzine and, coming back through the Red Sea in a temperature of 115, she caught some sort of a fire and the skipper ordered “Abandon Ship!”

If you could only imagine the Red Sea, that beautiful bright blue sea, perfectly calm, perfectly still, blazing blue sky, and the ship just standing there. At any moment she is going to blow up, and Nick Tamlin is there in the boat with the mate, and one hundred yards away the skipper in a boat with the rest of the crew, and they lay on their oars watching, and the ship still stands there, and the skipper said: “Shall we go back on board, boys, and see what we can do? Any volunteers?”

There may be one in a couple of thousand who would have had the courage to go back on her. I know I wouldn't. Nick Tamlin says: “Yes, I'm going”, and he went back on board and helped to put the fire out, and they brought their ship back; and Nick Tamlin received the Lloyd's Cross, our highest decoration of award.

Whenever I think of that man, of his courage and his integrity and his bravery and the way he would always sneer at those who were not

with him, I am always reminded of a thing I read once in a book about a King of England who was fighting in France. They had fought all day and they knew that the next morning all sorts of troops were coming up against them, and one of his men turned round and said, "I wish we could have some men from England here to help us fight", and the King said these words: "If we are to die, we are enough to do our country loss: if to live, the fewer men the greater share of honour. If there is any man here who hath no stomach for this fight, let him speak forth. His passport shall be made and crowns for convoy put into his purse."

I know you will curse me for saying this, but the fact remains—you know it as well as I do—we've been going to sea all our lives, it's the only job we know, it's the only job we want. We shall keep sailing out.

But before I have finished this talk, I just want to tell you the nicest little yarn that I have come across alongshore sides yet. It is about a sailor who had just come back after a seven months' trip. He's been dive-bombed, he's been shelled, he's been raided, he's been mined; he's done everything, and he's walking down the street with a deep-sea roll and his best civvies on, and an old lady comes along

to him and pins a white feather on to him, and he picks the feather out and says, "Lady, why can't you bend a duck round this?"

Good-bye boys.

“British Corporal”

You have heard in my last broadcast* about a dive-bombing attack. Well, really a dive-bombing attack is nothing very new because, to be quite candid, I was on a ship in 1937 or 1938—I'm not quite sure which it was—and we had a dive-bombing attack, practically the first of this series of this war on a ship.

I was on the *British Corporal*, a British tanker, and we were pushing through the Mediterranean. We had loaded up at Abbadan and were coming through to discharge at Avonmouth. And at that time the Spanish war was in full flight, and the Luftwaffe was absolutely on the top line. They had no anti-aircraft defence to consider. They had no balloons. They had nothing at all. They could merely come sweeping down on their nice little low-level bombing attacks and lay their eggs where and as they pleased. Hence, the fact that they won in Spain.

I'll never forget that attack. It was in the morning about six o'clock, I was stand-by Quartermaster, standing on the wing of the bridge looking idly round, and I watched the second cook rub the sleep out of his eyes as he

* This is 1011b nine

trudged along the for'ard well-deck along to the forepeak complete with the galley boy. They got hold of a rope, threw it down the forepeak and they lashed a barrel of flour on it; and I could see the poor old second and the galley boy heaving and straining and tugging, and finally they got the barrel of flour up on the deck. Put the hatch boards back, unbent the rope, and away they started trundling it along the deck.

Very, very nice scene!—sea was as calm as glass, no wind, just nice calm, cool, early morning in the Mediterranean and I heard an aeroplane.

Well, at that time an aeroplane was—you might call it a novelty. We called it a novelty at sea, and I watched the little speck approaching and he came along closer and closer and closer. And then suddenly he swooped right down on our starboard beam, flashing right past us; and I heard a funny sort of rattling noise and I thought at first it was coal in the bunkers sliding about and then I realised he was firing a machine-gun at us.

I made one duck down underneath, dashed up on to the bridge, and the skipper was looking absolutely petrified with astonishment. The second cook was trundling the barrel along the well-deck. Round came the plane back

again in one swooping dive right on top of us. And then the crash—I'd never heard anything like it—as a bomb dropped in the water about fifty yards on the starboard beam. And we were loaded with benzine.

The skipper—we've always called him a cantankerous old bloke—but immediately he was alert on the *qui vive*, and he gave orders for zigzagging. Hard to starboard went the quartermaster, and she started away practically at right angles to her course. All hands came up and a greaser on watch below, the four-to-eight greaser, poked a weary greasy face from out of the fiddly (stokehold) and said, "What's all this?" and went down below again. And the second cook continued to trundle his barrel.

Back came the plane right down over the foremast and machine-gunned us. The skipper remained there on the bridge like an iron man, zigzagging hard to port.

That plane dive-bombed us, that plane, the pride of the Luftwaffe, came down on top of us, and we hadn't even a balloon on the end of the stick to defend ourselves with. She screamed down on top of us and laid her eggs all over the ocean, and we had fifteen thousand tons of benzine on board and they couldn't hit us.

And back he came, foremast high, right across the ship, port and starboard, splattering his eggs all over the ocean. Raining machine-gun bullets all round us, and he never hit us. He must have altered the bed of the Mediterranean quite considerably. And then he circled round us again and again. And the Skipper was still on the bridge, and the second cook and the cabin boy were under the flying bridge.

I remember I met the second cook in Cardiff afterwards and he said, “Do you know what that there dratted boy said to me as we were there under the bridge?” I said, “No, why, what did he say?”

“Well”, he said, “that Jerry came down and was covering the deck with machine-gun bullets, and you know what the tank tops were like at the time?”—I said “Yes.”

“Well”, he said, “the boy gets hold of me by the arm and says, ‘Don’t they make lovely red sparks when they hit the deck?’”

Talk to Seamen, Liverpool

HULLO shipmates, how are you keeping? I'm a sailor also, but so far I'm ashore recuperating from one or two things that happened to me at sea. But I would like to know how you are getting on. In any case, I wonder how you're listening to this. Maybe the quartermaster's at the wheel and the skipper has his wireless going full blast. Maybe you're the bo'sun or the carpenter, old Chippy sitting there in his cabin wondering what he's got to do for the next day and wondering what jobs he's got to do, with all the boys hanging round the door just listening to this programme.

Well, this is a real sailor speaking to you. I shall speak in our own slang, in case anyone should possibly want to interfere. And I shall tell you that I am a Bluey Boy.* You know what a Bluey Boy is out in Liverpool, but I know how dreadfully worried you all get when you're out at sea, wondering about what's happening at home.

Well, if you're anybody listening to me from Liverpool, well let me tell you this, that we're doing fine. The old port at Liverpool is keeping

* Bluey Boys = blue water sailor, a deep sea man.

flat wide open. They're coming in and they're going out and they're being turned round. Everything's a little quiet round here, but not too bad. We're having a pretty good time, as a matter of fact, but you out at sea—Gosh! I wish I was with you.

I hope that there's someone on British tankers who's listening to me now, and you're pushing up past the Twelve Apostles. I wonder if it will be the second dog-watch and all the boys are sort of gathering round; and you've done your dhobying, and you've given the Peggy* a piece of your mind, and you've cursed the cook up hill and down dale, and you're sitting there talking as you always talk and as you always will talk—SHIP. Day in and day out. Never anything else. Ships you've been on, ships you wanted to go on, ships that you've cursed, bad ones and healthy ones, beautiful ones.

Remember that lovely trip you did last trip?—Your last trip was always the best wasn't it? But you keep your spirits up; just keep sailing and keep sailing. There's all sorts of boys here, and if you had to listen to a lot of people talking, you'd get the idea that we come ashore and we stay ashore for months and months and months, and finally the police

* Peggy = boy.

come and get hold of us and drag us off to ships.

War or no war, they're still going crazy at the Board of Trade they can't get enough men for the ships. Because there just aren't enough sailors in Liverpool to cope with our shipping. They're pushing off out—Gosh! There's four fellows live next door to me. They've come back, one fellow from a nine months' trip—and he's not crazy, either. He's had ten days ashore, and he's pushing off out again the same as was always done.

And remember this, boys. When this war is over and when peace has settled down and the skipper's hanging his dhoby on the Hotchkiss mounting on the bridge, and you can go and take your stroll along the poop and not see the old 4-inch gun—when the war is over we'll know and we'll talk about the things we did. We'll remember all those brave fellows who we knew; the funny times that we've had, times that we've come back out of convoy with a load of meat or a load of fruit and said "To blazes with 'em", and we've got through. We've got past a submarine, we've got past the dive bombers, we've got through the mine-fields and we've come home. And we've sailed out. We always *will* sail out.

Forty-three Days in an Open Boat

I HAD had a pretty bad packet at sea, and I was put on to a naval hospital ship, and had rather a bad time, and finally I was getting better—recuperating. And one afternoon I shall never forget—I heard a bumping sort of scrape along the ship's side—we were anchored out in midstream—and we sort of knew, with that electrical tension that goes through a sick-bay ward, that there were some new patients coming on board, and I eased myself up out of bed, sat on my pillows, and watched.

The door opened at the end of the ward, and in came the stewards carrying stretchers, and they passed along just close to me, and I could see those stretchers, with blankets over them, and underneath the funny, queer, shrivelled little . . . skeleton—of a man. And I watched them as the stewards walked slowly through the ward as they carried them into the medical ward. And I lay back in bed and wondered what on earth had happened to those men—and then I found out later—I was talking to one of the stewards.

It appears that three men, these three men, had been torpedoed on Christmas Eve. Their ship had been proceeding nicely and steadily. And suddenly there was a *query*, and the ship stopped dead under the impact and started to sink. These men—four of them—crawled into a boat, and they pushed away and watched their ship sinking—on Christmas Eve. And they were thirty days in the boat—and they were thirty-three days in the boat—and they were thirty-seven days in the boat—without shelter, without comfort, without security and with Death, like an armed man, standing by them.

And the thirty-seventh day their food gave out. They had no more food—not even a tiny little morsel, that little crust no bigger than your thumbnail of hard, ship's biscuit. Even that was gone. They had licked their condensed milk tins dry; they had scoured out the bottoms of their little bully-beef tins; they had no more food. And three days after that, their water gave out, and they spent seven days without water, relying on the dew that fell, on the tiny little tropical rainstorms that came down.

And they were finally picked up; one of them had died, and the other three were living skeletons, so weak that they couldn't give their

names, so weak that they couldn't think, so weak that they were dying.

And these three, little shrivelled husks of men were brought on board the naval hospital ship and they lay there on water-beds—mattresses filled with water at a little less than blood heat—and they started to get better. And in three weeks' time those men, members of the Merchant Service, were fit to go home. I wasn't quite fit, but when I did get home, I went along to the house of one—his name was—well, we'll just call him Bill. I knew his address and I went along—he'd told me about his wife, and everything—and I went along to meet Bill again and to see how he was getting on and to take him out for a pint of bitter at the local.

And I went to the door, and his wife came, and I said "Where's Bill?" and she said, "Oh, Bill?—Bill?—oh, Bill was home for about ten days and he couldn't stick it. He signed on about a fortnight ago.

(Record ended here abruptly.)

Tough Mate

IN the Merchant Service we call our Chief Officers Mats; and when I came back from my hospital ship, where I had been getting better from my own wounds, we had several people on board who had also been shipwrecked, and amongst them there was the mate of a ship that sailed from Liverpool.

He was a little man, the size of two-penny-worth of copper, about 5 feet 4 inches, very, very sunburned, and with that far-away glint in his eye which you always get in a deep-sea man. I often used to wonder why, what he was doing, what his story was, and how he happened to be coming back; and he never told me, he never told anybody. But I finally got the story from one member of the crew of the lifeboat in which McCarthy had spent such a long time—his name was McCarthy. His ship had been torpedoed about 800 miles from land, and McCarthy and twelve other men got into a lifeboat and they watched their ship sink. They were in the tropics, pretty rough sea, and they spent the first twenty-four hours and they never touched their food or their water, and then, when they opened up their

water canisters after twenty-four hours, the water was brackish, there was salt in it.

They spent seven days on that boat, seven days, and seven nights, with a tiny morsel of biscuit to eat, if they could eat it, and no water. And thirst was upon them, death was standing by them, and these men sailed that boat and rowed that boat, with never a murmur, and McCarthy sat there at the tiller and kept her on her course and kept their spirits up, and there was never a murmur for seven days and seven nights—without a drop of water.

And on the morning of the eighth day they came across an enemy tramp steamer. They pulled their boat alongside, and McCarthy climbed up the blistered side of this tramp, up the Jacob's ladder, on to the deck and up on to the bridge, and there, to use our own expression, he lowered the boom on the ship's company for food and for water and for cigarettes and for tobacco, and for maps and things like that.

All was lowered into the boat, and the boat laid off, and the Captain turned round to McCarthy and said: "You can't go back in that boat, you are a belligerent. You have a Marine in the boat, I can see his cap." And McCarthy, with seven days' starvation, seven

days of thirst, seven days of frantic worry, and seven hundred years of sea tradition behind him, turned round on the skipper and laid him out cold—and took a flying jump over the side, a 40-foot dive into shark-infested waters, and swam to his own boat and made sail and got the oars out and beat them to it and dodged them in the dark, and brought that lifeboat 700 miles back, into Bathurst.

When I met him he was coming home in a suit three sizes too big for him, that had once belonged to the Governor of Bathurst. McCarthy, tough mate, never said a word, not a syllable. He had merely done his job.

The Dive Bomber

SAILING at sea these days is by no means the job it was in the last war. In the last war you merely had your surface raider to look after or your periscope to look out for, or your occasional minefield. But in this one, you've got a combination of all those together, and added to that you have something that you can only describe in the biblical words: "The terror that flies by night." Only it's not night, it's the dive bombers.

We've just about got him taped now, believe me, because when we get in the danger area we *know* that all sorts of things can happen to us. But principally we can expect a submarine, and we get the old 4-inch gun ready and we have her loaded; and we are standing down, and we get the Hotchkiss gun out, and we clean it and polish it and we practise with it and we are all set and ready.

And the ship goes on doing her steady 200 miles a day, and you get closer and closer and closer into that area, and the sea turns from black into deep green, and you know that you are coming in, and you're coming in, but you're waiting for him. You've got a *gun*—you can *defend* yourself!

And one evening, out of a clear sky, he'll come on you. You see him there, right up in the distance, a tiny little speck, and you whip out your binoculars and you look at him and you say, "Now, what is it, what is it—is it a Lockheed, is it a Sunderland?" And you watch it, and suddenly an idea flashes across the back of your mind: "My God! it is!" and you make one flying dive towards the Hotchkiss, and you scream out "Aircraft attack!"

Whip the covers off; she's loaded and ready. Get behind, he's coming down to you, he's coming down, and the noise is screaming and screaming, and you think to yourself, "My God! he's coming for me, for *me!* for *ME!*" And you're standing there, and you can feel the sweat running down the backs of your knees. Then he gets closer and closer, and you can see those horrible splashes of the bullets as they come across the water and go ripping across the deck—and there's a noise like the opening of the gates of hell, and he's gone—and he's dropped his bombs—and he's missed you!

And you stick another clip in, and you wait for him to come back—and he will come back, and he gets his sights all set, and he has you there, dead ready, and he comes down in a screaming, tearing dive, and you stand there

and you're *paralysed* with fright and you don't know which way your deflection is and you don't know whether your gun will be properly loaded and you don't know whether you oughtn't to drop the whole damn thing and go over the side—and you pray—and he comes close to you—and you let one little burst go out, and you see the tracer bullets, and you say "God! I've GOT him!"

"Switch it just a little over to starboard—Let her go, boys, he's going right into it!" And he does—he walks right into the bullets—right smack into them! He gives one enormous leap into the air, like a tremendous hiccup—UP—and then *down*—and he crashes—and you leave your gun, and you go and look over the side, and you watch it there in the water—a funny little black blob.

Then the skipper turns round and says: "Well, boys, they don't deserve it, they wouldn't do it to us—they're only rats! But go on—lower the boat—pick 'em up!" And we pick 'em up.

If there are any Nazi airmen listening to this, I wish them joy of their job. Personally, I'd much rather have a good Hotchkiss.

“City of Benares,”
“San Demetrio,” “Eurylochus”

I AM a sailor, an Englishman, and my first name is Frank. I am quite an ordinary sort of individual—all we sailors are. We have our job to do and we do it. You can see me or my mates anywhere in the whole world; you can find us in Jovey's Saloon in Montreal, or you can find us dancing in the Trocadero in Brisbane, or you can find us getting slightly kettled in Jack Dempsey's Bar in New York. We don't wear any uniform. We have a small silver badge.

Well, when this war first started the Navy sent round asking us what we would like to do—whether we would want to have Navy personnel on board our ships to man the guns; or whether we would like to train and handle them ourselves. Well, naturally, we said we would defend our own ships. And so we all went to schools started all over in the seaports of England, and we learnt how to handle the 4-inch gun and the anti-aircraft gun, and everything going.

We started this war—we entered into this

war—we, the sailors, with a distinct understanding in our own souls that we would fight clean. Well, all sorts of things happened to us; some of us did long and unpleasant trips in prison ships, others were torpedoed and spent—one man I know spent as much as forty-three days in an open boat. But we didn't mind; we were young and we were strong and we were healthy. And then things started to happen to us.

I found a ship in Liverpool and I found out, as we will on board ship before we sail, that she was taking evacuee children to Canada. I was so scared at the thought of taking those children, and I was so scared of anybody getting to know about it, that I even gave my allotment note to the Post Office with the instructions that they would send it to my mother five days after I had sailed. So that even my poor old mother wouldn't even know the name of the ship that I was on.

Well, we sailed out from Liverpool; we scouted round the coast of England, and one night we picked the children up and we went out. It was the happiest and yet the most dreadful trip I had ever done in my life. Of course those children, they were *ordinary* children, boys and girls in between nine and twelve; little boys and little girls so pathetically

seasick at first, and so wonderfully bright afterwards. They used to come up on the gun and look on us with awe, astonishment and fear, and ask us to open the breach so that they could look up the muzzle. And generally we had a beautiful time.

We wore our cyclids out, looking for submarines; we did watch and watch and watch and watch, and finally we got them safely into Montreal. We sailed up the St. Lawrence and we handed them over to the kind care of friends who were waiting for them; and we rubbed our hands together and we said: "Boys, that was a good trip, that's over", and we went into Joey's, and we bought ourselves a few beers. We loaded up with food and we came back to England. We had no children on board for the return journey.

Five days out from England I was on watch on the poop, and I saw six *query*. We trained the gun on it, because the Hun has a very nice habit of hiding a submarine behind a boat. We saw no one in the boat—no sign of life. We sailed right up to it. We made a lee, and I was one of the men who went down over the side, and we put grapples on the lifeboat and we *query* over the side and swung her inboard.

In that boat, laying in the bottom, there

were sixteen dead children; ordinary children, may be the little boy or girl who lived next door to you. Children! And their faces were blue and pinched with the cold, and their little hands and knees were covered with scratches and blood where they had gone down the ship's side into that boat. Some of them had little nightdresses on; others were half-dressed, others were fully dressed. Their lifebelts had cut rings and grooves and chafed with saltwater round their necks; and we stood—the men of that ship, looking at that lifeboat, and we swore by everything we held holy that we would be avenged.

Because we know—we sailors know since—they had waited for the *City of Benares*. I am sorry if anybody listening to me had children on the *City of Benares*—it's opening up old wounds I know, but it's infinitely better that these old wounds should be opened and remain open to the end of the war than we who are left, strong and healthy, should forget about it. Sixteen dead children! On a cold winter's evening, 500 miles from land. Dead! I can't forget it. Will you ever forget it?

We came back from the *City of Benares*. We buried our cargo at sea; we separated and we went on other boats, and stranger and even more horrible things happened to us.

Then we did another trip. I came back, and one evening in a pub I was talking to an old shipmate of mine, and he told me of something that had happened. He was on a boat; he had said good-bye to his wife knowing that he was going out on a benzine tanker—and, believe me, even in peace time a benzine tanker is no picnic. They went over to America and loaded her up with benzine and they brought her back. Those men sat on top of 15,000 tons of benzine—15,000 tons of benzine that had to be taken straight out of the ship and put straight into a bomber.

Coming back their convoy was attacked; a German raider appeared on the horizon, and with their superior guns and their superior range, she shelled the convoy. Five shots landed on board the ship and the midship house, and burst it into flames, ripped it wide open. Another shot landed on the after well-deck and burst the tank tops open. The ship was ablaze—she was flooded with benzine—and the captain ordered "Abandon ship". They went over the side and into one boat filled with about fourteen survivors under the charge of the second mate, a man named Hawkins.

Well, as they got into the boat, Hawkins was looking out and he saw the last man

coming down the ladder. He was a greaser and his name was Boyle or Doyle, I am not sure which, and as he came down the gangway he slipped and he fell across the gunwale of the boat, and he picked himself up and his face was the colour of a bucketful of ashes.

They pushed the boat off and left their blazing ship, and went out into the waters of the Atlantic—mid-Atlantic—the Atlantic in a gale; and for two days those men were adrift on the Western Ocean in that boat. They were safe, as safe as I am sitting here, as safe as you are in your homes, because that was the *Jervis Bay* convoy, and they knew that they were going to be picked up—that destroyers were out looking for them. And during that time Harry Boyle had stayed in the boat; he'd never shirked his watch, he'd bailed, he'd steered, he'd kept a lookout, and he had never complained.

After two days they came across the *San Demetrio*. She was still ablaze but she was still floating, and those men—those fourteen men—went back on board and they put the fire out; and they sealed the decks up, and with the aid of a lifeboat compass and a Philips' Atlas, without stores, without radio, and without help, they brought that ship back into England with 12,000 tons of benzine on board her. And

Paddy Boyle was an engine-room man, and he crawled up the ladder on board the *Demetrio* and he went down into the engine-room and he watched for two days and for two nights without rest or respite, or sleep, and he never complained.

And in the evening of the second day, Paddy went up aloft to his room, and laid down on his bunk, and died. And when they went to pick him up he just hadn't any ribs; when he'd fallen across the gunwale of the boat he'd stove them in.

They buried him at sea, under the Union Jack—a sailor's grave, a sailor's death.

But they brought 12,000 tons of aviation spirit home for England, and that same spirit was intended to go into a bomber that would scream over Berlin and scream over Hamburg, and blast the daylight out of them and leave them in the misery and desolation that they have caused all over the world. That benzine will go into tanks that will go down the Underden-Linden; and those men who have been chased out of Dunkirk and tricked and cheated will be behind those guns on the day of Victory, on the day of the sailors' vengeance. But they didn't bring that benzine back to put in joy-riding cars.

That point is one that's a sore point with

me. If you people will only realise that no matter what you are doing, the food you eat, that the petrol you use, that the clothes you wear, that the cigarettes you smoke and matches that you strike to light the cigarettes, that the plush on the cinema seats—that everything—everything in England, is brought over by the sailors. We will never let you down; we will go through trials unimaginable; we'll fight and we'll fight and we'll sail, and we'll bring back your food.

If I were merely sitting here giving this—can we call it talk?—merely to ask you for money, how easy it would be. You'd merely dig into your pockets or your cheque-books. and you'd give me all the money I wanted. But we don't want money. There's a scheme on foot these days; all over the world you see the letter “V”. All over occupied Europe, all over England, is that “V”. We have brought you your food. But for us the “V” stands for Victory, and for *Vengeance*.

A long time ago I had four friends, four shipmates, four schoolmates. In 1938 we came back and we decided that as we were all *query* and friends we would have a holiday ashore. We had a marvellous time; we were happy and we were sunburned, and Charlie had his wife. And I always look back on that

as a sort of calm before the storm, of this storm. You see, to digress for one moment, Charlie and I were very great friends and we both fell in love with the same girl. Well, she was a very, very wise girl; she chose the infinitely better man—she chose Charlie. Okay! I came to their wedding, I was Charlie's best man; we had a marvellous time and they were both happy.

Out of those four men I sit here now, with a funny little grotesque stump where a perfectly good right foot used to be. Billie was blown to hell on a minesweeper; George went down with the *Courageous*. Let me tell you what happened to Charlie.

Charlie was on my ship with me, and we signed on, and he was very, very unhappy when we had to push off. We went out in convoy and we faced the dive-bombers and we faced the submarines, and twenty-one days out the convoy sort of broke up and we went our various ways.

We settled down to the ordinary routine life of a ship at sea, and one night—800 miles from land—I was on watch on the gun. At half-past six it was pitch dark on a tropical night. Suddenly there was a shot and a bang, and into the air there shot an enormous great yellow flare. I turned round and made one

wild dash for the gun, and as I got to the gun, suddenly a hell, an absolute holocaust of shells burst around us. They were firing on the star-board beam, complete broadsides, those six 11-inch guns and eight 5·9-inch guns.

Quick, up to the gun, open the breech, ram the shell, ram the charge home, close the oven door, stick the tube in, run to the trainer, train her round, quick, quick, and crash the shells are banging into us.

Round she's trained, the lights are there, try to get on the searchlight, duck under the muzzle, put your range on, bring it down, bring it down; pull the trigger. Bang went old Mildred! It was heaven.

Back aft, open up again, put the shell in, and then . . . there was a crash like the opening of the Gates of Hell!

I was thrown about six feet. I picked myself up and there was just no gun worth speaking of left. Up to my feet, round the poop, down the ladder, across the well-deck, stepping on a bloody gruel of men's bodies who had been smashed as they came out of the poop; up the ladder, along the upper deck. God, where's the bridge?—There isn't any. The captain is shouting: “Abandon ship”. The great glaring eye of a searchlight is blazing down on us. I turn to go aft and there on the deck is Charlie.

I never thought that any man could be so horribly wounded, and still live.

If you are listening, Mary, I have to apologise to you. I told you that Charlie died quickly and quietly, with a bullet through his head; but it doesn't matter, Mary, there are a lot of people listening to this, in the fo'c'sles of ships, and they will remember; remember that "V"; remember the Vengeance. Remember; remember what we have been through; remember what we're going through; and fight, and fight, and never, never, never give in!

The name of Frank's ship was *Eurylochus*
The raider that sank her was the *Von Scheer*.

On a Raft

WHEN you think of a raft, you nearly always think of the illustration in *Robinson Crusoe*, of Robinson on the raft. You know, a collection of boards tied together, with the mast and with the sail, a shirt and a couple of packing cases on it. But that isn't a raft.

The raft that we had been on when our ship had been sunk was the size of about six orange boxes, lashed together. Full oil drums, empty oil drums, and the sea was like green glass, with beautiful lights of phosphorus underneath. And we went over the side and swam, and there were sharks, and we *knew* there were sharks.

In a crazy hysteria of fear, we crawled on to the rafts.

I remember them so well as they came on. There was Mac wounded, MacDavid the Second Engineer. You know the old story by Kipling, that you've only got to go down into the engine-room of any ship east of Suez and shout "Mac" and someone is bound to come up. He was there. The junior "Sparks" was there. The two little midshipmen were there. I was there. The extra Fourth Mate and the Skipper, and the Chief Engineer.

Well, we huddled there together on that raft, and there were shouts and shouts, "Let go the painter"—She was tied to the boat, she was *tied*, and the boat was going down. We could see her going down. And suddenly, someone found a knife, and slashed and hacked away at the painter, and the raft floated free.

And we lay there on the raft, wounded—horribly wounded. And suddenly, without any cause or reason whatsoever, the raft overturned.

Just imagine to sit and feel the raft slipping and slipping from underneath you, and the water getting closer round you.

And then, suddenly, the raft had overturned.

But we got back, the Skipper got back, and the Chief Engineer, and we grabbed hold of poor old Mac by the scruff of his neck, and dragged him on board, and they dragged me on board. And from somewhere, or somehow, they picked up an extra Chinese, and they dragged him on board.

And we watched our ship sinking.

I was very, very fortunate. I was on the raft and I had been, let us say, so seriously wounded, that I was losing consciousness. But I remember two or three things that happened to me, and I don't think I'll ever forget them.

The warmth and the security, and the in-

finite love and tenderness, which one man—I'll never know who it was—kept his arm about me the whole time, to prevent me from slipping off.

I remember MacDavid, the Second Engineer, as he sat on the far end of the raft, with that little oar about 3-foot long, smacking away to scare the sharks.

I remember the sharks, blue, green and grey, as they swept up from the depths of the ocean to make huge vicious snaps at my legs. I remember the rasping, grasping sound, as they scraped along the bottom of the raft. But they didn't get us.

And all that night, and all that day, and all the next night.

I wonder if you can understand what I mean when I say that. All that night, twelve hours, and that day, twelve hours. But throughout the whole of that time, the wounded did not complain, and the healthy helped.

Throughout the whole of that time, the Skipper was never referred to as anything else other than "Sir". There were no complaints. There were no faintings. We stuck it. Holding on, for we knew, we knew that the raft was sinking. Those little oil drums had been pierced.

And then the smoke on the horizon. And

the little midshipman, our first trip midshipman, stood up on that raft and balanced himself on ten by eight *query* of drifting planks, and put his coat through an oar and waved it, and saved our lives.

And I lay there on the raft as the Spanish tramp steamer came alongside, and they'd lowered an enormous great fishbasket to put us in. And I saw the basket coming closer and closer and I lifted myself up and balanced on one leg and made a wild grab at this basket, as someone suddenly seized me by the seat of the trousers, and lifted me inside. But just as I left the raft, a horrible, burning, stinking pain went through my left foot, my remaining left foot, and it wasn't until later that I found out what it was. The sea had made a last bite at me. I'd been stung by a jelly-fish.

Meeting the Navy

THERE has always, in some indefinable way, been an antagonism between members of the Navy and the Merchant Service, because we are both doing the same job, and both do it in an entirely different way.

Let me tell you how I last met the Royal Navy.

I was on a Spanish tramp steamer, and very, very sick indeed. I had been three and a half days without any medical attention whatsoever, but that is beside the point.

I was sick, and as I lay in my bunk, in the little hospital of this tramp, a man came in and said to me, "There's an armed merchant cruiser on the horizon". And I remember I sort of passed out after he said that, because, as I came to, instead of finding my little cabin so calm and so bare, it was full of men, full of sailors, and I remember that I felt as though a man were putting binoculars in front of my eyes. One moment everything would be large, and the next moment they would recede to little tiny pin points.

I was getting delirious, I suppose, and as I lay there utterly helpless gazing at them, sud-

denly they seemed to part, and a man pushed his way to the front, and he wore the red and gold epaulettes of a surgeon of the Royal Navy. And he leaned forward, and I'll never forget him. He had even found out my first name. Because he got hold of me so gently by the arm, and shook me, and said, "Don't worry, Frank, we're here, we'll look after you. Now don't worry, we're going to put you to sleep now."

And they pricked my arm with squirts and they put morphia into me. Oh! it was heavenly. All the grinding searing pain had gone. I felt I was floating away on the top of a cloud, and they lifted me and whisked me outside. They cut away my clothes, they wrapped me in a blanket, and carried me in a flexible stretcher, and laid me down on the deck just by the gangway, ready to lower me into the boat. And as I laid there, on the deck of that steamer, under God's blue sky, and I looked and saw my Skipper with the light of hope shining in his eyes, and Mac laying there beside me, safe, and all the rest of we boys who had been on that raft. And I saw in front of me the huge mass of that armed merchant cruiser and, standing by me, two men in the spotless white of the Royal Navy.

Suddenly, something peculiar happened to

me, something I've never experienced before in all my life. I had a funny sort of constricting pain in my chest, and a burning sensation in my throat and my eyes. It had never happened before, and I didn't know what it was. But I found that I was crying. I missed my friends, I missed the men who had helped me.

I lay there on the deck of that ship, and cried not only from grief, but from happiness and from safety.

Sea Raider

(This was the *Von Scheer*. Frank, when he made the recording, by the way, had never heard a Quentin Reynolds broadcast.)

To add to this series, I've told you exactly what happened to me on board the ship. Perhaps without intending to, because at one time, the memory was so fresh in my mind, that I did not feel inclined to talk about it, or think about it, but now you know, I am the sailor called Frank. One of thousands.

I could tell you my name, but it doesn't matter. It is of no importance. My name might be "Smith" or "Jones" or "Brown" or "Robinson" or anything. I am merely a sailor.

And I have been through things, and I have seen them.

I could give all sorts of messages to you, if I were merely sitting here asking you for money, it would be so dreadfully easy. I know that you would give me anything that I wanted.

But, there is another thing. This is in a world-wide broadcast, and there is one man listening to me to-night, and I have a word for him

I wonder if you remember me, Mister. I wonder.

You're the Captain of a German raider, and on the 29th January you attacked a merchant ship. Don't you remember? Just when it was dark, you saw me then. You met me. At one time you weren't more than 100 yards from me. You followed us up. You chased us. You kept hidden. You were afraid even of our 4-inch gun, against your 11-inch guns.

You attacked us in the dark, at point-blank range. Don't you remember? Don't you remember shelling us for twenty minutes and then ceasing fire, and coming round to examine the damage.

I was on the starboard bunker hatch, you shone your searchlight on me. You'd shot my foot off. Don't you remember the Fourth Mate making a signal out to you that we were abandoning ship? And you answered the signal. Don't you remember opening fire on us again?

I remember it. We got on to the raft, didn't we? You saw us, you watched our ship sink. And you machine-gunned us. But you didn't do the job properly. Because out of that ship's company ten men are alive, and those ten men know what you did.

Three of us were wounded. Seven of us were not. Those seven are back at sea.

You'd be surprised if you knew the job that the Captain has. You'd be surprised, and I don't think you'd be very happy about it, either.

You murdered my shipmates. You stood by and watched us drown. You machine-gunned us.

But go ahead, Mister. Go right ahead.

Using your yellow, filthy, murderous methods, you may get another couple more ships. You work the same stunt on them. You'll leave them to the sharks, won't you?

But, your time is up.

Sooner or later, and it will be sooner, you will be met by the Navy.

Aircraft from the Fleet Air Arm will come over you, and they'll bomb you and blast you and your bridge will fly to pieces, as ours did, and your decks will burst open as ours did.

And then a battleship will come alongside, and I hope it's the *Warspite*. And with her 15-inch guns she'll fire you, and you will see your crew dead and dying. You will see your ship blowing up, and you yourself will be on a raft.

But we won't machine-gun you. We weren't brought up that way. No, we'll give you a little taste of what it's like in the salt water. Aircraft from the Fleet Air Arm will catch up

with you, they'll dive-bomb you, wave after wave after wave, and your guns will be as useless as ours was. And a battleship will come up, and I hope it's the *Warspite*, and you'll be shattered. You'll see your bridge go up in flames, as ours did. You'll see your mates hanging round on the decks, the same as I did. You'll see your ship sink, as I did. And you'll be there in the water, struggling as we were, and your life-jacket won't hold you up, and you'll go down and down and down, and the water will come in your eyes and your ears, and down your mouth, and you'll see death in front of you. And you'll come up to the surface, and the British seamen will get hold of you, and will drag you on board the boat. Because we don't leave men to drown.

But, remember, Mr. Raider, that when we have finished with you—and we won't use black-jacks or castor-oil—you'll wish, and you'll hope, and you'll pray that you had been left to drown, as you left us. But we didn't drown.

Your day is coming. Look out for it.

Sister Morris

I WAS on a hospital ship. I had got over the worst. They amputated my leg, I had got over my pneumonia, I was recovering.

When suddenly, out of the night, and out of the dark, my own self came up, and, if you can put it that way, tried to get me down.

I remember one night, as I lay in my bed there, the lights had just gone out and the boys who were with me were tossing and turning and had settled down into an uneasy slumber. And as I lay there, came the slap, slap, slap, of the waves outside.

Suddenly, a vision came to me. A vision who for me would for ever walk the streets of home town—on one leg and with two crutches. The vision of a man who would not be young and strong and fit, but a cripple. A dreadful, awful, horrible thing to happen to anybody.

I remember laying back in bed and sweating at the thought of it. Just to think—no more dances, no more walks, no more horse riding, no more swimming. One leg, and two crutches.

Despite all I had ever been through, I felt,

at last my misfortunes were coming to a head, and I was going under.

And I wasn't alone. In the next bed to me, was a little porter from Covent Garden. He was wounded as badly as I was. In the bed in front of me was little Ben from Rochdale, wounded much worse than I was. His first tiip as ordinary seaman, he lay there, and worried about his mother and his father; worried about his life, for he, too, had lost a leg.

And I remember the shades of misery and unhappiness were coming over me, when Sister Morris, our Ward Sister, came round on her nightly inspection. And as she passed my bed I remember I put my hand out and grabbed hold of her. She said, "What is wrong?" And I remember ever so distinctly saying, "Sister, do you think that any girl would ever fall in love with me—with one leg?" And I remember her looking at me, with a torch shining on her white breast, and she said, "Of course they will. I think I could".

And remembering that and remembering her voice I fell asleep.

I was there, and Charlie and Bert and the whole ward was full of us. The whole ward was full of us and Sister Morris gave me that message.

I shall never forget her, and Sister, if you're

listening I have a message for you. I did find her, and she did.

I met her not so long ago. I have two feet now and I can dance and I can play tennis and in another month I'll be going back to sea.

My Street

You all know your street, the street where you were born. In my case, I was born in this particular house in this particular street. I had lived there all my life, and I had sailed from there as a sailor, and it was pretty dreadful to come home, because my particular home town had received—shall we say *attention* from the Hun; and I didn't know what to expect. But all the time when I was coming home I kept thinking of Egerton Street, where I was born—my mother and my father, and when you come down the front garden and look down the road, and at the bottom there you find our lifeboat, the *William and Kate*, and you see the docks and you know everybody.

I remember coming home so well, when they met me at the station, with a car and ran me home, and I saw damage of various descriptions. I saw houses with their windows out, and my heart was in my mouth until that car—it was a tiny little one—came hurtling round the corner, and there was No. 57 and it was absolutely all right. Mother was there at the door, and I remember getting out of the car and going over to meet her, very

stiffly and ungainly because I had gone away with two shoes and socks, and I came back with one.

When mother saw me, she didn't cry. We don't cry in my family. We merely shook hands, and she kissed me and said, "I'm glad to see you home". And across the road there came all the neighbours. "Hullo, Frank, how are you? I'm so glad to see you back." All of them, everybody that I knew.

There into my own little front room—they'd even put my bed down there, so that I could sleep quietly and comfortably and wouldn't have any stairs to climb. That homecoming I'll remember. Oh, to come home from anything else would have been an anti-climax, but to come back to Egerton Street as a wounded sailor! That was something.

Let me tell you about this street. At the bottom, as I said, is our lifeboat, she's only saved a matter of about seven hundred and fifty lives in this war, just seven hundred and fifty lives. All the lifeboat crew live just close to me. At the very bottom of the road, on the right-hand side, there lives a young gentleman who last attained fame by doing a trip on the *Altmark*. You never see him now. He came out of the *Altmark* and went back to oil tankers. He said it was a lot safer. He comes home

about every four months for about thirty-six hours, and then goes away again. And then next door to him there is a laddie who has had about four certificates from the National Lifeboat affair for rescues at sea. He is a lifeboat man, also a local fisherman. His family have lived in my little home town for about three hundred years. I'd like you to meet him some time or other.

And then next door to me there is a little laddie Able Scaman. His first name is Mickey—very, very sunburnt, and with startlingly blue eyes, like the sky looking through the eyes of a skull almost. Because that's how he looked when I saw him the last time. He'd had ten days in an open boat, but of course Mickey's gone back to sea, he'd had about seven days at home and couldn't stand it.

And then further up, George—my friend George. George went down on the *Courageous*. Further up than him we had our wildest spark, Billy who was with me down on the *Silver Foam*, when we were on the beach on that glorious summer of 1938—when we had all mill girls and all the trippers coming down. Piling them into the boat, and running them up and down the river. Heavenly times!—One shilling for adults, sixpence for children, with everybody getting seasick, and roars of

laughter resounding all over the river. Bill was the life and Soul of the *Silver Foam*, but Bill was blown up on a mine sweeper.

Further up at the top we have Stanley. Stanley came home, so mother told me, about nine months ago and said nothing to anyone, and then he pushed off back to sea. And then about a month after that she opened a newspaper, and found that some enterprising reporter had got hold of the story of Stanley. Stanley, it appeared, was a gun-layer on board an oil tanker, and about 500 east of Trinidad he was on the poop one morning when a German submarine came to the surface, about 800 yards dead astern.

Stanley was a very, very wise laddie—he had his gun already loaded. He merely walked quietly towards the trigger; depressed the gun; put on his elevation; got his sights across the conning tower—and let fly.

The submarine disappeared in a cloud of smoke, and later large patches of oil were seen, and several very disconsolate Huns were brought on board and were given er—well, they were made welcome.

All those people live in my street. Good people, so kindhearted. So honest and so gentle. Men with the deep sea in their eyes, men who have lived in the sight of God and

man. Decent, clean, honourable lives. Men who you could imagine standing on the decks of the *Revenge* with Sir Richard Grenville. Men who you know were on the *Victory* with Nelson at Trafalgar. Two who I know were on the *Exeter*—from my street, my little Egerton Street. But I was thinking, it could be your street, as well as my street. Shall we say it's *our* street, Victory Street. I think you'll all agree that it is.

Postscript

As this book was going to press, Frank went back to sea as a Seaman Gunner.

He took with him a letter of appreciation from the Minister of Information, who had heard some of his talks.